



The News Journal

"It's a big day," said Allan Scrutchfield, a maintenance and traffic foreman with R. E. Pierson Construction.

And just like any theatrical production, last-minute glitches delayed show time.

A sign down here, a message board not running there.

Curious motorists sneaking onto the highway before it officially opened.

Overall, the opening was a success.

"I think it went pretty smooth," said David Duke, the transportation department's resident engineer for the project and the man directing the opening. "I'm tickled with it. We had a couple of minor delays, but overall ... it's really gone good."

Traffic backed up at times as crews made their final adjustments, necessary to switch southbound traffic from U.S. 13 to Del. 1. Cars and trucks sat at a standstill on the Del. 1 bridge over the canal for 15 minutes as crews readied for the big moment.

That was when Richard Roux of Wilmington stepped out of his car to investigate. It was 12:25 p.m., and he had a 1 p.m. appointment in Dover.

"There has to be a better way," he said as traffic sat snarled around him. "I'd rather they just open it up at midnight or 1 a.m."

Highway officials said a nighttime opening wouldn't have been safe for workers or motorists.

Carol Gage of Clayton also was frustrated as she waited for the road to open, but it wasn't because she was late.

She just doesn't think Delaware needs another toll road.

"The road is going to benefit people who live out of state, not people who live here," she said.

Highway planners have been eager to build the relief route since the mid-1980s as a way to

ease congestion on U.S. 13. People traveling that road on any summer weekend are familiar with the headaches that heavy beach traffic and stoplights in Odessa and at Boyds Corner can cause.

Reviews from some of the first drivers to travel Del. 1 on Monday were generally positive, even though some were caught off guard by the switch.

"I don't know how much time you save, but this has been a pretty rapid route," said Craig Essick of Philadelphia. "It was a nice ride, and it was well-designed."

Aileen Herweg of Wilmington said she was confused at first when police steered her to the new road.

"I was like, 'Where are these people leading me to?'" said Herweg, who was driving to Salisbury, Md. "But I think it was actually faster."

Officials said travel on Del. 1 should be much easier today now that the switch has been made. Some leftover work may cause temporary lane restrictions this morning, Duke said, but the bulk of the work in the southbound lanes is complete.

The focus, he said, will now be on getting the northbound lanes of Del. 1 ready for the Nov. 16 opening.